



Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer

**2004-2007
BUSINESS PLAN**

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Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT)

Business Plan 2004-07

MANDATE

Established in 1974, the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer serves as an independent body through which stakeholders work cooperatively for the benefit of learners to ensure smooth secondary to post-secondary and post-secondary to post-secondary transitions and effective transferability of courses or programs within the post-secondary system.

ACAT provides leadership to Alberta's post-secondary transfer system to achieve:

- increased educational opportunities for adult learners through student transfer; and
- accurate information for learners about admission and transfer opportunities.

ACAT operates with the support of the Minister of Learning and the co-operation of Alberta's post-secondary institutions. Student transfer involves the portability of educational credit among programs. Based on successful completion of studies, students receive transfer credit, where appropriate, upon admission to an educational program in an Alberta post-secondary institution.

VISION

To be recognized nationally and internationally as the premier post-secondary admissions and transfer system.

MISSION

The mission of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer is to be a catalyst for necessary change and an advocate for learners in the areas of admission and transfer to educational programs.

ACAT provides leadership and direction in the improvement and enlargement of educational opportunities for learners through inter-institutional transfer. This requires a commitment to improving communication among and between Alberta's post-secondary institutions, as well as stakeholders in the trades and secondary system, and to promoting the advantages of a system of education, with all that means for educational planning for the benefit of learners.

To carry out its mission, ACAT:

- identifies issues and explores resolutions to these issues with stakeholders,
- advocates for learners at both a general level through its Principles (Addendum A) and a specific level through interaction of ACAT's staff with learners,
- communicates with stakeholders and encourages communication among stakeholders on matters regarding admissions and transfer, and
- provides a forum for discussion of issues arising out of environmental change and trends related to post-secondary education.

CORE BUSINESSES

Admission: Admission practices and policies at post-secondary institutions are clearly articulated.

Transfer: Facilitate agreements among post-secondary institutions to acknowledge and recognize appropriate previous learning experience.

Communication: Ensure that learners and other stakeholders have timely and accurate information about admissions requirements, course and program transfer opportunities and transfer policies, and provide a forum for inter-institutional discussion of admissions and transfer issues.

Education and Advocacy: Inform Albertans about the benefits of our admissions and transfer system, and assist and advise other jurisdictions about the procedures for and benefits of establishing and maintaining an efficient and effective admissions and transfer system.

PRINCIPLES

The Council endorses the following as basic to its purpose and activities:

- (a) **Student access to higher education and the opportunity for student mobility among institutions of higher education in Alberta shall be optimized.**

Barriers to student mobility shall be minimized. The integrity of educational programs and certification must, however, be maintained. A student should not be required to repeat previous learning experiences in which competence has been demonstrated nor should more transfer credit be granted than previous learning experiences would warrant for successful completion of the program.

- (b) **Negotiation of opportunities for student mobility shall be based on the recognition that while learning experiences may differ in a variety of ways, their substance may be virtually equivalent in terms of content and rigour.**

Insofar as possible, transfer arrangements should allow for maximum recognition of previous learning experiences. The concept of **virtual equivalence** is vital to such arrangements.

- (c) **Effective academic advising and career counselling and optimum mobility require that the student have prior knowledge of at least the minimum transfer credit which can be awarded.**

The *Alberta Transfer Guide* indicates the minimum transfer credit which is available for prior post-secondary educational experience upon admission to a post-secondary institution. Additional transfer credit may be negotiable on an individual basis.

- (d) **Individual institutions have the primary responsibility for instructional programs, even though responsibility for higher education is shared among various constituents. The responsibility of institutions includes program design and delivery, determination of academic prerequisites and student admission criteria, and certification of the academic achievement of students.**

In respect of student access to institutions and programs, it is to be emphasized that factors in addition to academic prerequisites often are employed as admission criteria. That is, while possession of academic prerequisites makes an applicant eligible for admission, it does not **guarantee** admission to an institution or to a particular program.

- (e) **Institutions have the responsibility and the prerogative to investigate the total educational preparation of applicants seeking admission.**

Such investigation is intended to determine admissibility and appropriate transfer credit, and to counsel applicants. The relevance and quality of the applicant's most recent educational experiences should be the basis for admissibility and for transfer decisions unless such consideration would unfairly disadvantage the applicant. Differences in earlier preparation should not adversely affect consideration of the applicant. (See Principle "b" re **virtual equivalence**.)

- (f) **Post-secondary institutions are committed to developing and maintaining clearly stated policies and procedures for consideration of transfer credit and to applying them in a consistent manner.**

Students should be able to obtain an institution's rationale for a transfer decision, and institutions should have clear procedures for a student to obtain a review of a transfer decision. The clear and transparent nature of transfer of credit is reflected in the *Alberta Transfer Guide*.

- (g) **After students are granted admission to an institution under a transfer arrangement, they shall be granted the same rights and privileges as students who began their studies at the institution.**

All institutional members of Alberta's transfer system have endorsed Council's principles and endeavour to apply them with respect to transfer within the province, regionally and nationally.

PRINCIPLES OF ALBERTA LEARNING

The Principles of Alberta Learning are reflected in the Principles of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer.

Learner-Centred..... The lifelong learning system is focused on the learner.

Accessible Albertans have access to affordable, quality learning opportunities.

Collaborative..... Learning is a lifelong human endeavor that best occurs when partners and stakeholders work together to provide a holistic approach and a supportive environment.

Accountable The learning system is accountable to Albertans for quality results, system sustainability, and fiscal responsibility.

Responsive The learning system is flexible and meets and anticipates learner need.

Innovative The learning system demonstrates leading edge innovation for improved results.

Equitable Albertans have equitable access to lifelong learning opportunities.

SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The following opportunities and challenges could impact ACAT's ability to achieve its goals. ACAT examines these drivers to determine the appropriate strategies and initiatives that will enhance and improve educational opportunities for learners through inter-institutional transfer.

Block Transfer

As Albertans pursue career paths that require further learning, more block transfer agreements would provide expanded opportunities for career laddering from certificate to diploma to degree programs. At the same time, there is a need to be cognizant of students who fail to complete the block of courses to ensure they do not have to repeat learning.

Campus Alberta

A major, learner-centered initiative for increasing the cohesiveness, flexibility and responsiveness of Alberta's learning system, Campus Alberta's vision is for Albertans to have access to a barrier free learning system where learning providers collaborate to deliver quality lifelong learning, where and when Albertans need it. The transfer system will be critical to Campus Alberta's success, given the changing relationships among institutions engendered by such initiatives as eCampus Alberta and the new Campus Alberta Quality Council.

Complexity of the Learning System

Global competition, the increasing complexity of society, the varying needs of increasingly diverse learners, and the necessity of ensuring programs remain responsive to changing industry, business and societal needs increase the complexity of the post-secondary learning system. A wider variety of educational delivery methods, an increasing demand for prior learning assessment and recognition, and the potential for more degree granting opportunities, are other forces which will, coupled with finite resources, create a demanding environment for achieving ACAT's goals and outcomes.

Careers and Lifelong Planning

Career pathways are educational processes that develop an individual's life and work competencies to enable them to make informed choices about future educational and career opportunities. The intent is to move the individual more easily from schooling into satisfying life and work roles. Lifelong learning initiatives recognize that adults continue to need education and training for personal and career goals throughout the course of a lifetime. As the secondary system becomes more involved with intensive career planning and with responding to lifelong learning needs, the admissions and transfer system will need to react appropriately.

Student Advising

There is a continuing challenge to provide effective program advising information to prospective transfer students. Learners considering transfer require access to accurate information about programs and courses they need to select for successful admission and transfer into the chosen program.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2004-07

ACAT has identified strategic priorities to respond to the significant opportunities and challenges influencing its ability to achieve its goals and strategies for 2004-07. Through its review of internal and external challenges, the strategic priorities described below have been identified and will be worked on concurrently. These are in addition to the important ongoing core businesses of ACAT.

Learner Transitions

ACAT will provide leadership to ensure that secondary to post-secondary admission issues are addressed. ACAT will provide clear information to high school students to help them select appropriate courses to meet entrance requirements of post-secondary programs and thereby make a smooth transition to post-secondary study.

Pan-Canadian and International Leadership

As a leader in admissions and transfer, ACAT will assist other jurisdictions in Canada and internationally to establish their own transfer systems.

ACAT's Profile

To ensure its excellent and respected work continues, ACAT will raise the profile of its work and the transfer system within Alberta.

Recognition of Prior Learning

ACAT has adopted principles and standards for the recognition of prior learning and post-secondary institutions have developed policies. Through its Advisory Committee on Prior Learning, ACAT will work to enhance the recognition of prior learning in Alberta.

Research

Increasingly, ACAT will use research to inform the admissions and transfer system and measure the achievement of ACAT's goals.

CORE BUSINESSES, GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND MEASURES

ACAT has identified four goals with specific outcomes that describe the end results it wants to achieve in fulfilling its mission.

Core Business One: Admission practices and policies at post-secondary institutions are clearly articulated.

GOAL 1 Facilitate the development and maintenance of fair and equitable admission practices and policies at post-secondary institutions

- Outcomes**
- 1.1** Students make smooth transitions from secondary to post-secondary and post-secondary to post-secondary studies.
 - 1.2** Students have improved opportunities to apply for admission.

Strategies and Key Initiatives

Strategy 1A – Promote smooth transitions as students move from high school to post-secondary programs.

Key Initiatives

- Collaborate with Alberta Learning and stakeholders to improve secondary to post-secondary articulation.
- Conclude the Social Studies and Science articulation process, and establish new articulation committees involving secondary and post-secondary system stakeholders as needed.

Strategy 1B – Advocate for appropriate recognition of academic upgrading courses.

Key Initiatives

- Expand recognition of academic upgrading courses for admission to post-secondary programs, where appropriate, and continue to work with partners through the articulation process to ensure currency and integrity of admission charts.
- Work with Alberta Learning and stakeholders to facilitate appropriate recognition of academic upgrading courses to fulfill high school diploma requirements.

Strategy 1C – Explore the feasibility of compiling system-wide admissions policies and criteria, as referenced in the Learning Commission report, and disseminate to students.

Strategy 1D – Advocate for the development of Internet applications for admission and access to course registration, such as the Electronic Application Service (EAS).

Performance Measures

Outcome 1.1

- Publish charts showing academic upgrading courses accepted for admission to college, technical institute, university or private university college programs in lieu of those offered in regular high school programs.
- Successful articulation of the the new Social Studies and Science high school curriculum.

Outcome 1.2

- Report outlining system-wide admissions policies and criteria at Alberta post-secondary institutions.

Core Business Two: Facilitate agreements among post-secondary institutions to acknowledge and recognize appropriate previous learning experience.
TRANSFER

GOAL 2 **Learners receive appropriate educational credit when they transfer from one Alberta program to another**

- Outcomes**
- 2.1** An effective and efficient student transfer system.
 - 2.2** Prior learning assessments are given system-wide recognition.

Strategies and Key Initiatives

Strategy 2A – Develop and enhance system-wide principles, policies and procedures to continuously improve the student transfer system.

Key Initiatives

- Establish a “Best Practices” subcommittee to identify and publish best practices in transfer.
- Encourage efficiencies by asking institutions to review internal transfer approval processes based on best practices.
- Encourage institutional partners to negotiate course transfer agreements where appropriate.
- Encourage partners to develop program or block agreements that ladder from one credential to another.
- Facilitate transfer agreements through ACAT’s Private Providers Policy.

Strategy 2B – Monitor the effectiveness of the transfer system.

Key Initiatives

- Collaborate with partners to produce the annual Transfer Patterns Study.
- Conduct research on transfer student profiles to support the CMEC initiative on Credit Transfer.
- Assess the impact of the work of the Campus Alberta Quality Council on the transfer system.
- Assess the impact of the work of eCampusAlberta on the transfer system.
- Use results from the graduate student satisfaction survey to assess the satisfaction of students using the Alberta transfer system.

Strategy 2C – Ensure the continuing accuracy of transfer agreements.

Key Initiatives

- Continue collaboration with institutional Contact Persons to review all transfer agreements before production of the next *Alberta Transfer Guide*.

Strategy 2D – Improve program articulation.

Key Initiatives

- Maintain ongoing program articulation initiatives, and expand to other disciplines as needed.

Strategy 2E – Advocate for the development and system-wide recognition of effective institutional policies and procedures for assessment of prior learning.

Key Initiatives

- Continue to collaborate with partners to enhance prior learning assessment and recognition.
- Use ACAT’s PLAR Advisory Committee to assess the state of PLAR in Alberta.

Performance Measures

Outcome 2.1

- Publish the Transfer Patterns Study annually to provide information on trends in student transfer
- Publish the *Alberta Transfer Guide* annually and update the *Online Alberta Transfer Guide*
- Publish accurate transfer advising charts in a timely manner.
- Increased number of course transfer agreements are negotiated annually.
- Increased number of program or block agreements are negotiated annually that ladder from one credential to another.
- Private Provider Fact Sheets are available to all post-secondary institutions.
- A "Best Practices" in transfer report is produced and distributed to institutions.
- Research on transfer student profiles is conducted.
- Analyze data and share results from the graduate student satisfaction survey.

Outcome 2.2

- ACAT's PLAR Advisory Committee assesses the state of PLAR in Alberta and reports to ACAT.
- A report on best practices in PLAR is produced and distributed.

Core Business Three: Ensure that learners and other stakeholders have timely and accurate information about admissions requirements, course and program transfer opportunities and transfer policies, and provide a forum for inter-institutional discussion of admissions and transfer issues.

GOAL **3** **Learners have access to current, accurate information on admissions and transfer policies as well as course and program transfer opportunities**

- Outcomes**
- 3.1** Information to assist high school and potential transfer students is available.
 - 3.2** Alberta post-secondary institutions have a forum for inter-institutional discussion of admissions and transfer issues.

Strategies and Key Initiatives

Strategy 3A – Provide information to support students transferring to Alberta institutions so they can make informed decisions as they plan their studies.

Key Initiatives

- Continue to work with institutional partners to produce an annual compilation of all transfer agreements.
- Continuously update the database that is accessible through the *Online Alberta Transfer Guide* and improve the online help available on the website.
- Encourage stakeholders to link to ACAT and to the *Online Alberta Transfer Guide*.
- Promote the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS).
- Continue to provide the Transfer Infoline service.
- Publish program advising charts for selected subject areas.
- Continue implementation of the ACAT Communication Plan.

Strategy 3B – Provide information to support Alberta students transferring to other jurisdictions.

Key Initiatives

- Publicize the *Online Alberta Transfer Guide* beyond the province.

Strategy 3C – Provide information to support admission of high school and transfer students from other provinces applying to Alberta post-secondary institutions.

Key Initiatives

- Continue to produce advising charts to support admission of high school students from other provinces applying to Alberta post-secondary institutions.
- Explore the feasibility of providing information on transfer agreements between Alberta institutions and those of other jurisdictions.

Strategy 3D – Provide a forum for inter-institutional discussion of admissions and transfer issues.

Key Initiatives

- Provide opportunity for a round table discussion at ACAT meetings.
- Ensure the host institution at ACAT meetings has an opportunity to make a presentation on their institution.
- Maintain the Contact Persons list serve as a communication medium.
- Hold a Contact Persons meeting annually.

Performance Measures

Outcome 3.1

- Number of institutions that negotiated transfer agreements for publication in the *Alberta Transfer Guide*.
- Number of inquiries received through the Transfer Infoline service (email, telephone and other).
- The ACAT web site is updated regularly.
- ACAT brochures and other targeted informational materials are produced.

Outcome 3.2

- Opportunity for a round table discussion is available at every ACAT meeting.
- Host institutions make a presentation at every ACAT meeting.
- Contact Persons communicate via the listserv.
- A Contact Persons meeting is held annually.

Core Business Four: EDUCATION and ADVOCACY Inform Albertans about the benefits of our admissions and transfer system, and assist and advise other jurisdictions about the procedures for and benefits of establishing and maintaining an efficient and effective admissions and transfer system.

GOAL 4 Albertans are informed about the benefits of our admissions and transfer system, and ACAT serves as a model for other jurisdictions.

- Outcomes**
- 4.1 Albertans are aware of the benefits of our admissions and transfer system.
 - 4.2 Provide advice and assistance to promote inter-provincial portability of courses and programs.

Strategies and Key Initiatives

Strategy 4A – Educate students and other stakeholders about the benefits of the Alberta admissions and transfer system.

Key Initiatives

- Continue to have the Chair and Secretariat participate in and present at conferences, workshops and career fairs in order to raise general awareness of ACAT and the *Alberta Transfer Guide*.
- Encourage high school principals to include information about the admissions and transfer system and a link to ACAT's web site on their school web site.
- Continue to have the Chair meet with the executives of the Alberta College & Technical Institute Student Executive Council (ACTISEC) and the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) on a regular basis.
- Increase connections within Alberta Learning to facilitate ACAT's appropriate involvement in Alberta Learning projects, such as the Raising Awareness of Planning for Post-secondary Studies (RAPPS) initiative, Learning Clicks, and the Campus Alberta initiative.

Strategy 4B – Advocate for the use of provincial transfer guides where they exist.

Key Initiatives

- Participate in discussion and consultations related to the national portability of courses.
- Share information nationally on Alberta's best practices with respect to its admissions and transfer system.
- Attend and/or present at national and international meetings and conferences on credit transfer and PLAR.
- Investigate the possibility of establishing a Canadian association on credit transfer as a network of agencies dedicated to facilitating student mobility between institutions and sectors across Canada.

Performance Measures

Outcome 4.1

- Number of presentations made at conferences, workshops, career fairs and within Alberta Learning to raise general awareness of ACAT.
- Number of meetings with the executives of ACTISEC and CAUS.

Outcome 4.2

- Number of national and international meetings and conferences on credit transfer and PLAR attended.
- Preliminary work on the possibility of establishing a Canadian association on credit transfer is begun.
- Anecdotal evidence that ACAT is perceived as a national leader in the establishment of admissions and transfer systems.